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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



[The Editor is not responsible for opinions expressed in this Department.]

THE SUFFRAGE

I

DEAR EDITOR: I noted in the last JOURNAL a suggestion that the question of Suffrage would again be brought forward at the St. Paul meeting.

I must add my word of protest. I do not feel that any organization has a right to vote upon a question which is in no way related to its object, and which is absolutely one for the individual to decide.

Every nurse has the privilege of her own convictions and if as an individual she wishes to affiliate with the suffrage movement she can always do so through the various women's clubs which are agitating the question. Her attitude on the suffrage question has no bearing on her effectiveness as a nurse, and in no way tends to make her a good or poor member of the association.

Surely the attitude of the nurses at the State meeting in Buffalo was proof of their opinion where an organization was concerned, and yet there were many women in that gathering who are advocates of suffrage.

As organizations we have no part in it, and in looking over the constitution of the New York State Nurses' Association, I find that we were organized to uphold and further the profession of nursing.

I consider that a vote in favor of suffrage would be in direct opposition to our constitution and a crushing blow to the nursing profession.

Yours very truly,

MARION T. BROCKWAY, R.N.

II

DEAR EDITOR: I feel I must take this opportunity to enter my individual protest to the action taken by the national convention at San Francisco, and to the attitude taken by our nursing journal,—from which we have always expected a broad-minded and liberal stand on all subjects concerning the progress and advancement of the age in which we have the good fortune to live.

It is the general belief of the world at large that nurses, collectively, are the most narrow minded, self-satisfied and unprogressive of all classes of professional women. How lamentably has the convention at San Francisco justified and strengthened this impression! I, for one, should feel personally mortified and humiliated did I believe such action represented the opinions of the majority of the nursing profession.

But I do *not* believe so. Our delegates did not go instructed or otherwise prepared for such an issue.

To take the stand that such a vital question is "not a matter for consideration in such an assembly," "that the question of suffrage is none of our profession's business," is reasoning too weak for comment; in short, it is no reasoning at all.

But it is a deplorable lack of understanding of all that the great woman's movement stands for, and in just what ways the nursing profession is affected by it. For of all progressive movements now before the world there is none that touches more closely our profession than the one in question. In many reforms being brought about through the active efforts of women, the nurse stands out pre-eminently as the medium through which the desired results must be obtained.

In prison, almshouse, and hospital reforms, in the questions of hygiene and sanitation alive now in every progressive city, in the agitation of moral prophylaxis in our public schools and slums, along these and many similar lines, who can play a more important part than the nurse with the valuable technical knowledge of her training?

Surely she should walk hand in hand with the woman so valiantly struggling for the vote that is going to make, in fact is making, such reforms possible.

And so suffrage does not concern the nurse? What does concern her, I wonder? Let us reduce it to its simplest equation. The business of every nurse is to bring back the diseased and sick, as near as possible, to a state of health. I think we will agree to that. But upon what does a state of real health depend? Upon a healthy mind, body and soul; unto all three of which a true nurse must minister.

Healthy minds and souls depend largely upon existing social conditions, for which the intelligence of all men and women is responsible.

The faults of our social conditions account largely for the insane (or mentally sick) as well as for the morally diseased.

Who should be more closely in contact with either class than the trained nurse? Who could be of greater use or larger importance?

Is she then to concern herself with the effects only, and lose entire sight of the causes? No, to be part of the effective and active force her profession should play along these lines she must be intelligently concerned in all that it entails; in other words, she must be vitally interested in the re-enactment of present inadequate laws and the establishment of new and suitable ones to govern such conditions.

Upon what does the state of bodily health depend? Primarily upon good pure food, and water, fresh air, and sunshine. Simple things surely, and all things the good God intended us to have. But what proportion of the sick in this world have these things? Ask any nurse and she will be obliged to answer, the great majority have them not. And why? Because the world as regulated by men is not regulated fairly,—material things are not divided evenly, and it so happens that these simple necessities of health conditions are impossible for the poor to obtain.

Should the nursing profession not be interested in putting these same necessities within reach of all the sick and needy? Certainly we should be and are. But nothing will ever make such things possible except laws governing pure food, milk, ice, and water, laws governing all questions of hygiene and sanitation, laws which will insure healthy tenements, though the landlords' bank accounts be decreased thereby, and which will accordingly be fought as long as money and politicians are the law-makers; and, finally, laws restricting marriages between the physically unfit.

Are not nurses concerned with such legislation? Why, who more so, pray?

You who say not, speak falsely or misguidedly. We *are* concerned. By all our desire for the health and happiness of the world, by the great professional opportunity given us through the knowledge of our training to minister towards, and bring about all such conditions of health and happiness; by these great rights I say we are concerned.

How long would we have had to fight for registration, had women had the ballot? Does registration not concern us? Does the means of obtaining it not concern us? And what means more quick and sure than by the votes of women?

My friends, we have made a great mistake. Let us rise up then and blot out this disgrace of the San Francisco convention. Let us ask the great and good army of suffragists to forgive us, for we knew not what we did. Next year our delegates will go instructed, and next year when the vote comes up, the action of this last convention will be repudiated,—but excused. The vote will be overwhelmingly affirmative.

Respectfully,

M. E. MCCALMONT, R.N.,
Superintendent Civil Hospital, Manila, P. I.

LOCAL ANTI-TUBERCULOSIS SOCIETIES

In the *Public Health Bulletin* of Michigan, April-June, is a timely article by Dr. Herbert Maxon King of the Loomis Sanatorium, Liberty, N. Y., in which he hits several nails on the head.

"The first work of any newly formed organization should consist in arousing a real and lively interest in the subject on the part of the community as a whole. In the effort to awaken this necessary interest care must be exercised to present actual facts without undue exaggeration of the dangers of infection on the one hand and yet with emphasis upon the vital necessity of intelligent preventive measures on the other. In many communities the interest of the medical profession itself in the problems of tuberculosis is not what it should be and what it must needs be if an effective campaign is to be prosecuted. Where such a condition exists the first work of the local society must be directed towards awakening a keen interest in just this quarter. Where tuberculosis is very prevalent such missionary work is not at all likely to be required, but it is highly probable that even in sparsely settled districts the incidence of tuberculosis is more common and generally distributed than might be supposed, and it is in such communities, where the daily routine of the medical practitioner is arduous and time-consuming, that he is most likely, in the exigencies of his many calls, to slight the important work of detecting early tuberculosis and of assuming the somewhat thankless task of instituting rigid measures against its spread. Once the interest of the medical profession in any community is thoroughly aroused the education of the laity along the required lines almost necessarily follows."